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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3431
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001531

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/11/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: UN ARAB-KURD HIGH LEVEL TASK FORCE NEGOTIATIONS
BEGIN, BUT SEPARATELY

Classified By: Political Counselor John Fox for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: UNAMI Special Representative to the Secretary General Staffan de Mistura (SRSG) met separately on June 10 with Government of Iraq (GOI) and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) delegations chosen by GOI Prime Minister (PM) Maliki and KRG President Barzani. This began High Level Task Force (HLTF) negotiations on disputed territories in northern Iraq, based on UNAMI's Disputed Internal Boundaries (DIBs) reports. The meetings were held separately due to the Kurdish representatives' late arrival in Baghdad. UN representatives report that the initial meetings were helpful but largely introductory, setting the stage for weekly meetings: both sides will meet jointly with UNAMI every Tuesday afternoon. According to UNAMI, both sides appeared to be serious about the negotiations; it was clear however that the Kurds want to see progress more quickly than their counterparts. The UN has asked that the USG not yet pressure either side regarding the meetings in order to let the UN establish itself as the main broker in this forum. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) The HLTF was a forum devised by the SRSG for discussions on disputed territories following the distribution of the UNAMI DIBs reports to senior GOI and KRG leaders in mid-April. The SRSG requested that PM Maliki and President Barzani name trusted negotiators who can represent them effectively in the discussions. On Wednesday afternoon, June 10, representatives from GOI and KRG met separately with SRSG and Deputy SRSG Andrew Gilmour (NOTE: Gilmour will become the Acting SRSG next week following de Mistura's departure. END NOTE). PM Maliki chose Safa Al Din Al Safi and Farouk Abdallah as his representatives. President Barzani chose Khalid Schwany, Mohammed Ihsan, and Saad Barzinji. Al Safi is GOI Minister of State for the Council of Representatives and an independent Shi'a United Iraqi Alliance party member. Abdallah is a Turkman COR member with the Independent Turkman Front party. While neither belongs to the Da'wa party, both are affiliated with PM Maliki. Schwany, a PUK member, is one of the two Kurdish members of the Article 23 Committee; Barzinji is the KDP bloc leader in the COR, and Ihsan is the KRG point person for Article 140 issues. (NOTE: UNAMI would like to limit each delegation to two people. END NOTE).

3. (C) Originally a joint lunch meeting was planned, but the Kurds' late arrival necessitated separate meetings. UN representatives report that both sides seem committed to serious negotiations to address territorial disputes between the GOI and KRG, using the UN-prepared DIBs reports as reference points for the discussion. Both sides agreed not to discuss the negotiations with the media for the duration of the process. The UN plans to distribute a press release today making public GOI and KRG participation in the talks.

4. (SBU) The delegations committed themselves to meeting every Tuesday at 3:00 PM. The group will next meet (jointly) Tuesday, June 16. This meeting will establish principles and ground rules for the succeeding meetings.

UNAMI will take the lead in the process, determining the agenda and leading the discussions for each meeting, and acting as the secretariat for the duration of the negotiations.

15. (C) UN representatives report that the KRG side wants the negotiations to move faster, dealing with larger, important issues sooner, and determining final disposition of disputed areas quickly. The GOI side wants to move more slowly, Qareas quickly. The GOI side wants to move more slowly, focusing on establishing confidence first and considering specific local issues in depth. The SRSG made it clear that it is important for this forum to demonstrate progress soon in order to remain viable. UNAMI is developing confidence building measures (with Embassy and CF input) to support the negotiations.

16. (C) UNAMI requested that neither Embassy nor CF raise the HLTF with GOI or KRG officials at this time so that the UN can establish itself as the main mediator in this forum. Embassy staff will continue to reach out to UNAMI to monitor progress of the discussions.

COMMENT

17. (C) The UN DIBs reports and their ideas for promoting confidence-building measures may become useful tools to keep the negotiations from becoming derailed or stalled, but both delegations include hard-liners who will make UNAMI's efforts a real challenge. Despite their June 10 participation in separate meetings, the delegations' commitment to negotiations has yet to be tested. Furthermore, we will have

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to see whether the lack of Da'wa party representatives on the GOI side betrays a lack of seriousness on the part of PM Maliki. END COMMENT.
HILL